





DR. NEWMAN'S  
'DREAM OF GERONTIUS.'

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## LECTURE III.

*DR. NEWMAN'S*

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A POET is not always interesting to his readers exactly in proportion to his artistic eminence. The distinction drawn by Wordsworth at the opening of the 'Excursion,' between what he calls 'the vision and the faculty divine' and what he calls the accomplishment of verse, does not apply itself only, as he applies it there, to those who write and to those who refrain altogether from writing. It enters also into our comparative estimate of certain different classes among literary men. With regard to some, we should say, that what they give to the world is, more emphatically, an exhibition of talent, of intellectual brilliancy, of pure literary power; whilst, as to others again, we cannot but feel that their efforts come upon us as suggesting something more, as

outpourings from unsounded depths within the character, as irrepressible utterances of the hidden soul.

Now, in the earlier stages of society, the true and born poet was not looked upon, I apprehend, as a literary man at all; he belonged to a race apart (*ἀνεμανίας οὐδεὶς ποιήτης*), and was ranked accordingly among prophets rather than among authors; he was a favoured servant upon whom a precious burden was laid; a chosen interpreter, to whom noble messages were entrusted—messages which he was driven, under the pressure of a self-consuming enthusiasm, to communicate in music to man. But as civilisation rolled down from those august heights and clouded solitudes, where, according to the common belief of nations, her original fountain-head derived itself from God; as she flowed into a thousand circulating channels, and fertilised new ground, the arts of life gradually assumed a more practical and definite form. When this took place, the poet was, in a great degree, unmantled and dis-crowned—perhaps at present I ought rather to say, was disestablished and disendowed;—he had, whatever the proper phrase may be, to retire into the background. Sophists, rhetoricians, orators, and statesmen all thought that they could teach the people how to live and what to wish for, much better than solemn old gentlemen

who kept crooning their mystic hexameters, in harmony with the motions of a staff. Philosophers, in their turn, maintained that the right to bore mankind with discussions about τὸ ἐν and the pure reason, was indisputably theirs; whilst historians made it clear that the necessary twist could be given to facts more succinctly and more plausibly in prose than in verse. Poetry, therefore, though it still continued to live and to please, ceased to be that exhausting burthen, that painful wrestling with the powers of the universe, by which its earlier votaries were at once ennobled and overwhelmed. Still, however, some rays from the retiring sun-god were refracted around the image of the bard; and, even to this day, there lingers a belief, true or false, that when a poet, real, original, and unmistakeable, rises upon us, his genius, his inspiration, as we call it, is something special, something differing not in degree but in kind from any inspiration which urges on the orator, the statesman, or the mathematician. When, therefore, we turn to our present imaginative writers, who come forward as artists and creators to enchant us with the graces and varieties of a beautiful literature, a half thought crosses the mind now and then whether the harp which they have inherited retains all her original strings; whether the chord of



mystery which at first gave a tone of strange power and earnestness to the whole instrument, has not somehow or other relaxed itself, and silently mouldered away. If, then, at such moments we find in our path some lonely and single-minded searcher after wisdom,—

‘Whose soul is like a star, and dwells apart,’—

if we find one for whom life is no arena upon which brilliant accomplishments may be displayed, or glittering crowns of victory arrived at—no place for easy pleasure, or even the most innocent self-indulgence, we are surprised and startled into reverence. We, perhaps, may be wasting our time in frivolous pleasures or unsubstantial pursuits; but, to him, his life has ever proved a problem which all the years of it are too short to solve—an arid desert massed up with mirages and phantoms, through which he has to struggle, in order that he may bring himself face to face with his own ideal of the truth. Such a man—and I call Dr. Newman such a man—if he writes verses, writes them because he cannot help himself; the travail of his heart must come out somehow, or else it will tear him to pieces; and in his restlessness he discovers that verse, for him, is the natural outlet of feeling. From his thoughts any idea of mere literary



success is a thousand leagues away. The subjects which he chooses are not those most susceptible of poetical embellishments. No; they are his own doubts and struggles, the glimpses of light and the oppressions of darkness which alternately cheer and sadden his unparticipated existence. To put it better than I can, he grapples, not as an imaginative exercise, but in deadly earnest with

‘Those obstinate questionings  
Of sense, and outward things,  
Fallings from us, vanishings,  
Blank misgivings of a creature  
Moving about in worlds not realised:  
High instincts, before which our mortal nature  
Doth tremble, like a guilty thing surprised.’

From such a man we may be as far removed in spirit and in feeling as if he were an inhabitant of the Dog-star; but still we find ourselves, whenever we meet him, in the presence of something unquestionably noble. Moreover, if we regard him as a poet, though others may delight us more, though his intellectual gifts for that particular purpose may be comparatively unimportant, still the fibre of intensity is always alive within him; and over him the sense of intercommunion with something higher and deeper than man

‘Broods like the day, a master o’er a slave—  
A presence that is not to be put by.’

It is not wonderful, therefore, if we think sometimes that he may be united to the rapt singers and prophets of old by links of feeling, and touches of privilege, which obtain no entrance into more brilliant souls; it is not wonderful, therefore, if we pause sometimes to consider whether it be not to such as him, rather than to such as them, that we ought to look for any fragments of the lost and forgotten tune, for any last faint echoes upon earth from that primeval melody which arose in heaven when 'the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.'

Now, if the distinction I have here taken be a sound one—if Dr. Newman, by some delicate thread of connection, be affiliated to the older instincts, and the more prophetic half of the poetical character—if for him the imagination be not an intellectual plaything, not a mere musical instrument, but the appointed spiritual energy by the help of which he raises himself, at intervals, to glance over the imprisoning walls of sense and matter into the spiritual world beyond—then surely he deserves from us, as a man of high and unusual nature, the most attentive consideration.

I am not here, of course, to claim for him a literary station as high as if he were a Tennyson or a Browning; or, indeed, to deny that Tennyson, throughout his 'In

Memoriam' and elsewhere probably, is visited by that remoter and more authentic inspiration of which I have been speaking; but still, for Tennyson, as for others,—

'The rainbow comes and goes,  
And lovely is the rose;  
The moon doth with delight  
Look round her, when the heavens are bare;  
Waters on a starry night  
Are beautiful and fair;  
The sunshine is a glorious birth,  
Albeit he know, where'er he go,  
That there has passed away a glory from the earth.'

For Dr. Newman, on the other hand, the inaccessible muse Urania is almost his only patroness; from her eight earthlier sisters he gets hardly any assistance. Nay, unless I misconceive his philosophy, he scarce believes in any real rose, in any actual rainbow; the stars themselves are little more than phantom lights, visionary flashings of that great dream, woven between the soul and God, which men agree here to call for the moment our visible and material universe. Now to us, originally of coarser texture, and who have knocked about the world ever since, who have gone sessions, squabbled with attorneys as revising barristers, and done work for the Poor Law Board, much of this is almost inconceivable. The children and

champions of compromise, we undergo a sense of insignificance and degradation which creeps into the marrow of our bones when, as in the 'Apologia,' we stumble upon a man who, really and earnestly sincere, has lived always in, for, and by the spirit alone. His love of truth is so keen, so subtly keen, that the will answers to every breath of logical impulse, just as our telegraph-wires acknowledge the lightest pulsations of an electric current. We may gasp with astonishment, when we find that a casual phrase of St. Augustine's has upset, as if it were a house of cards, some cherished theory which the labour of years had gradually wrought into shape; we may smile when we perceive how simple, how child-like in many ways was that powerful mind, beneath whose sway the hearts of so many 'were moved to and fro, as the trees of the wood are moved by the wind;' but still the more we know, the more we honour the man, the more do we accept him as a strange, an abnormal, a solitary, but still as a beautiful soul. Among other matters, more important no doubt, but less within my province, if we read his poetry, we read it with affectionate respect, not so much because it is exquisite in point of art, as because it is essentially spontaneous, spiritual, and deep. A good deal of it, doubtless, awakens no echo in our

sympathies, it does not speak to us, possibly because our sense of hearing is not of the requisite compass; but we all of us, in our degree, have been vexed and harassed by inward struggles; we all of us have known the weight of darkness upon our life, and therefore we can all feel that in this prayer—this cry—for light, there is an intense reality and truth which lend to it no ordinary charm:—

THE PILLAR OF THE CLOUD.

'Lead, Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,

Lead Thou me on!

The night is dark, and I am far from home—

Lead Thou me on!

Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see

The distant scene,—one step enough for me.

I was not ever thus, nor pray'd that Thou

Shouldst lead me on.

I loved to choose and see my path, but now

Lead Thou me on!

I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,

Pride ruled my will: remember not past years.

So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still

Will lead me on,

O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till

The night is gone;

And with the morn those angel faces smile

Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.'

I have entered upon these preliminary details, and



dwelt upon the inborn peculiarities which Dr. Newman himself has disclosed to us, because all his poems, 'Gerontius' among the rest, grow out of his whole character. They are the expressions of a nature, not the developments and elaborations of an art. It is remarkable how, more than once, in his 'Apologia,' this strange man recurs, with something like fear, to a haunting sense that all the outward aspects of matter are phantasmal and unreal: a sense which seems to have been about his path and about his bed from early childhood. I have known the same feeling, or one like it, in others. I have known men, yes, and young children also, with such an impression, seldom given out, but always on cross-examination found to be lurking at the heart. We poco-curanti who think life too short to be wasted on metaphysics, and who refute Berkeley in the style of Dr. Johnson, by kicking at a stone or a foot-ball, are apt, whenever we run up against such weird mystics, to feel dissatisfied with ourselves and every one else. We may go on furthermore to reflect (though that Buddhist creed implies the unimportance rather than the unreality of matter) how, at this very day, the absolute majority of mankind believe, under ancestral traditions beyond a date, in the transmigration of souls, and grow thereupon still hotter

and more flurried and more uncomfortable. We have even been known, for a quarter of an hour, to question whether all wisdom and all knowledge of human nature has condensed itself, as to time, within the latter half of this nineteenth century; and as to space, within some twenty streets round about Piccadilly and Pall Mall. Luckily for our peace of mind this unnatural modesty does not last long. But even when we have recovered our legitimate self-esteem, it may not be without profit to study the effect of such anomalous temperaments upon religion, upon politics, upon life. Our present business is with literature—with poetry, indeed—more especially the poetry of Dr. Newman. Now, original as he is, he cannot, any more than smaller men, escape from the conditions of his age. When he first became known, the influence of Wordsworth was perhaps at its highest; there was a surfeit of Byron; there had been a reaction from Scott; Tennyson, as yet, was below the horizon. I should therefore expect to find, as one result of Dr. Newman's scepticism with regard to matter, that he would remain comparatively unaffected by much in Wordsworth that produced a deep impression upon others. I should have previously imagined, for instance, that Dr. Newman would be somewhat hard and cold to the beauty



and influence of the outer world. I think, upon examining this point, that these anticipations of mine are realised more or less. We all know, at any rate, what the opposite tendency—the tendency, I mean, to see life in everything, and to spiritualise for himself all the manifestations of matter—have produced for us in Wordsworth. It has indeed so informed his poetry, that in spite of a religion keen, unintermitting and profound, he has been grumbled at by sound divines as a Pantheist. Speaking, however, not as a theological but only as a poetical critic, this is a heresy, if Wordsworth were a heretic, which I cannot bring myself to regret; under that stimulus he pursues Nature as if she were his mistress, and colours every description of her with a living glow of love. Dr. Newman, on the other hand, so far as I can judge from the book which I hold here, is not much interested in what for him has but little reality, and dwells but seldom on the earthly outside of things with any warmth of personal affection. Now this, in my judgment, is a grave defect. I think a want of sensuousness in a poet (and I say so openly, because the poetry of abstract thought is not likely to be undervalued at present,) fatal to very high eminence in that department of literature. Wordsworth, it may be said, has clothed deep and

original views with enduring poetry. True; but he was enabled to do so just because he united a character peculiar in its passion, no doubt, but still intensely passionate, with a great faculty of thought:—

‘The sounding cataract  
 Haunted him like a passion; the tall rock,  
 The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,  
 Their colours and their forms, had been to him  
 An appetite, a feeling, and a love.’

And therefore it is that the dry bones scattered about the ‘Excursion’ and the ‘Prelude’ have had strength given them to stand up on their feet and live. Nay, without referring again to what Wordsworth says of himself, how is it that Coleridge describes the inspiration of his friend?

An orphic song indeed,  
 A song divine of high and passionate thoughts,  
 To their own music chanted.’

It is this double refraction of passion and of thought, fused into one flash of blended light, which gives their life and character to his poetical diamonds; but still it is in the passion rather than in the thought, if we could but disentangle them, that we should find, I believe, the quickening spirit of the gem. Hence I think Dr. Newman in his earlier poems has suffered somewhat by assigning too much weight to Words-

worth's power of thought, without sufficiently taking into account the more poetical and less imitable qualities by which it is relieved. The same criticism may be directed with even more propriety against other esteemed writers who have enlisted, during the last thirty years, in the 'Wordsworth's own Cumberland meditators;' they may knit their brows like their illustrious colonel, but they cannot mimic 'the beatings of his heart.'

I once knew of two young ladies, both fond of poetry—both Wordsworthians to the tips of their fingers. The first had drunk in so deeply her poet's views of intercommunion with the life of the universe—views which suffered nothing to lie for him inert and dead—that in her universal sympathy she even out-Wordsworthed Wordsworth; she could not rest till she had clothed her very gowns with a personal identity and an individual character. She baptized them accordingly, as fast as they came home from her milliner, with sonorous names of heroes and of kings. Hence a girlish friend sitting with her was startled by the sudden irruption of a stern though affectionate maid: 'Now, Miss, you have gone and torn Castor, and Pollux is as dirty as the ground; you have nothing left for Sunday but old Lysander, and yet, you know, I told you over

and over again how wrong you were to leave Superbus behind.' Her rival inclined to the austerer side of the Great Man's intellect, and was found to have jotted down in her commonplace book the following awful entry: 'Resolved, for the future, to think clearly, comprehensively, and profoundly on all subjects.' This at the first aspect may appear the more noble proceeding, but I am convinced that if they intend to follow as poetesses in the steps of their master, the gownswoman of the two was in the right.

Nay, even as far as that master himself is concerned, I will make a clean breast of it, and confess that in spite of the width of thought and glow of feeling which distinguish him from his numberless imitators, I hardly look upon him as taking rank among the normal summits in the orthodox range of Parnassus, but rather as standing, with respect to such mountain brothers of song, like a peak of Teneriffe, apart, and unsympathising and alone.

To return, however, to our immediate subject. Any comparative insensibility to the beauty of nature, or to those outward aspects which stimulate the imagination of the passionate and sensuous poet, is in the 'Dream of Gerontius' of less importance. The region through which it moves is filled with the dry colourless light of

infinity, and not by those fluctuating rays which tinge our human atmosphere. I should say, therefore, that Dr. Newman, in grappling with such an awful subject as immortality and the state of the soul after death, had chosen well for himself; if such a statement did not somewhat imply that this fine poem had originated in an artistical pursuit of literary excellence, instead of springing up spontaneously out of the innermost fountains of a deeply religious mind.

However this may be, the massiveness of thought, the purity of feeling, and the austere grandeur of imagination which distinguish Dr. Newman, find here an appropriate place. In a more secular poem, I should expect that, either from the natural bias of his understanding, or perhaps from the collapse of all slighter emotions under the pressure of intense thought, a certain dryness and stiffness of style would have made themselves felt, and felt disadvantageously. Dr. Newman, however, is here dealing with high matters, fitted to call forth that deep-seated zeal and fire which always lay in the heart of his character—a zeal and fire which, in their instinctive rebellion against his pre-conceived plans for being calm and tranquil and reserved, often lend a subtle and peculiar charm to his writings. Besides, what I have called above an



austere imagination, that is, a faculty of which the business is to conceive and body forth great architectural wholes of thought, without frittering itself away on the details of ornamentation, is the only form of the imaginative intellect suitable to a drama so solemn as 'Gerontius,' and, in that respect, Dr. Newman is eminently strong.

And now I must ask your pardon, if I detain you at this point for a moment, by a short analysis of the poem which we are examining. I can hardly doubt that every one of you is at least as well acquainted with it as I am myself. But still, the old maxim that half the failures in love, in war, in trade, in every department of life, have as their cause the taking things for granted, claims a hearing, and must be attended to. 'Gerontius,' then, is a religious drama which describes a dying Catholic, not apparently a man of any special or exceptional holiness, but one who has struggled worthily through a long series of years, and is now before the gates of Death. He still is, as he ever has been, a dutiful and pious son of his mother Church; but his senses are shaken by pain, and by his human terror of the grave; his senses, moreover, half spiritualized as the strength of the flesh ebbs away from

them, detect on the air around and in the soul within, hostile and malignant emanations bent to poison his latest breathings, and to beat down that sacred hope which falters more and more as it approaches its fulfilment. Still he is supported against these unseen enemies by faith; and when his earthly destiny has accomplished itself, departs in peace. Immediately he finds that he is borne along by some protecting power, through sneering demons and sympathizing angels, up to the Throne of Judgment itself. The dramatic element is made up of a colloquy between him and this glorious creature to whom he has been entrusted. In order, however, to make head against the monotony which would ensue if this were all, the dialogue, as it proceeds, is from time to time relieved by the choral hymns of the seraphs whom they pass, interrupted by the malevolent utterances howled at by them by demons, who would fain impede their progress; and solemnly closes with a lyrical valediction sung by that immortal guide over the awe-stricken soul; which then is left, after having been at once cheered and blasted by a single glimpse of the Most High, to cleanse itself from those disfiguring stains which forbid its immediate entrance into heaven. Of the doctrines involved in this striking production it is unnecessary to say more



than that there is nothing, except the bare idea of purgatory (a theological and not a poetical blemish), which need prevent any Christian, or, indeed, any one who believes in the providence of God, from valuing it according to its deserts. It is built mainly upon those noble foundations which were laid eighteen hundred years ago, and which are still the common inheritance of Christendom, the common centre of our European civilization.

It is probable, indeed, that the first idea of composing such a dramatic work may have been suggested to Dr. Newman by the Autos Sacramentales of Spain, and especially by those of the illustrious Calderon; but, so far as I can learn, he has derived hardly anything from them beyond the vaguest hints, except, indeed, the all-important knowledge that a profound religious feeling can represent itself, and that effectively, in the outward form of a play. I may remark that these Spanish Autos of Calderon constitute beyond all question a very wonderful and a very original school of poetry, and I am not without hope that, when I know my business a little better, we may examine them impartially together. Nay, even as it is, Calderon stands so indisputably at the head of all Catholic religious dramatists, among whom Dr. Newman has recently

enrolled himself, that perhaps it may not be out of place to inquire for a moment into his poetical methods and aims, in order that we may then discover, if we can, how and why the disciple differs from his master. Now there is a great conflict of opinion as to the precise degree of merit which these particular Spanish dramas possess. Speaking as an ignorant man, I should say that, whilst those who disparage them seem rather hasty in their judgments, and not so well informed as could be wished, still the kind of praise which they receive from their most enthusiastic admirers puzzles and does not instruct us.

Taking, for example, the great German authority on this point, Dr. Lorinzer, as our guide, we see his poet looming dimly through a cloud of incense, which may embalm his memory, but certainly does not improve our eyesight. Indeed, according to him, any appreciation of Calderon is not to be dreamt of by a Protestant. 'Even learned critics,' says he, 'highly cultivated in all the niceties of æsthetics, are deficient in the knowledge of Catholic faith and Catholic theology without which it is impossible properly to understand Calderon.' And yet, without being Greeks we feel the *Iliad*, without being Parsees the *Shahnama* comes home to us, without being Mahometans the songs of Arabia quicken our

pulses with their lyrical impulse and fire; Berserker poets, Hindoo poets, even Chinese poets speak a language not unintelligible to our ears:—

‘One touch of nature makes the whole world kin.’

However true, therefore, these Teutonic dicta may be, we cannot be expected patiently to acquiesce in them. Dr. Lorinzer then goes on to say, ‘that old traditions which twine round the dogma like a beautiful garland of legends, deeply profound thoughts expressed here and there by some of the Fathers of the Church, are made use of with *such incredible skill* and introduced *so appositely at the right place*, that (I presume) even ordinary imaginations are awakened to the charm of the poetry, even ordinary understandings roused up to enter into the depth of the thoughts.’ Oh, no! I beg your pardon, I have misread the learned German. He does not finish his sentence in that way at all. What he does really say is this, ‘are made use of with such incredible skill, and inserted so appositely at the right place, that—frequently it is not easy to guess the source from whence they have been derived.’ The learned German’s notion of incredible dramatic skill, and exquisite appositeness of introduction, seems to be that the exercise of these high faculties should leave spectator or reader, as the case may be, in hopeless perplexity and con-

fusion. According to this method of reasoning, the logical objection against Calderon ought to be taken thus, that though often most meritoriously difficult, he falls short of absolute perfection in this, that it is sometimes possible to understand his meaning. Nevertheless, these scenes so unfathomably profound, these sublime enigmas, which exact, like the handwriting on the wall, a specially inspired interpreter to decypher them, were composed in the first instance to gratify, and did gratify, the uneducated populace of Madrid. I should like to have Calderon himself up, even for half an hour, if it were only that he might criticise his critics.

At the same time, Dr. Lorinzer's knowledge of his subject is so profound, and his appreciation of his favourite author so keen, that for me, who am almost entirely unacquainted with this branch of literature, formally to oppose his views, would be an act of presumption of which I am, as I trust, incapable. I may, however, perhaps be permitted to observe, that with regard to the few pieces of this kind which in an English dress I have read, whilst I think them not only most ingenious but also surprisingly beautiful, they do not strike me as incomprehensible at all. We must accept them, of course, as coming from the

mind of a devout Catholic and Spanish gentleman who belongs to the seventeenth century; but when once that is agreed upon, there are no difficulties greater than those which we might expect to find in any system of poetry so remote from our English habits of thought. There is, for instance, the 'Divine Philothea,' in other words, our human spirit considered as the destined bride of Christ. This sacred drama, we may well call it the swan-song of Calderon's extreme old age, is steeped throughout in a serene power and a mellow beauty of style, making it not unworthy to be ranked with that *Œdipus Coloneus* which glorified the sunset of his illustrious predecessor; but yet, Protestant as I am, I cannot discover that it is in the least obscure. Faith, Hope, Charity, the five senses, Heresy, Judaism, Paganism, Atheism, and the like, which in inferior hands must have been mere lay figures, are there instinct with a dramatic life and energy such as beforehand I could hardly have supposed possible. Moreover, in spite of Dr. Lorinzer's odd encomiums, each allegory as it rises up is more neatly rounded off, and shows a finer grain than any of the personifications of Spenser; so that the religious effect and the theological effect intended by the writer are both amply produced—yes, produced upon us, his



heretical admirers. Hence, even if there be mysterious treasures of beauty below the surface, to which we aliens must remain blind for ever, this expression, which broke from the lips of one to whom I was eagerly reading the play, 'Why, in the original, this must be as grand as Dante,' tends to show that such merits as do come within our ken are not likely to be thrown away upon any fair-minded Protestant. Dr. Newman, as a Catholic, will have entered, I presume, more deeply still into the spirit of these extraordinary creations: his life, however, belongs to a different era, and to a colder people. And thus, however much he may have been directed to the choice of a subject by the old mysteries and moralities (of which these Spanish autos must be taken as the final development and bright consummate flower), he has treated that subject, when once undertaken by him, entirely from his own point of view. 'Gerontius' is meant to be studied and dwelt upon by the meditative reader. The autos of Calderon were got ready by perhaps the most accomplished playwright that ever lived, to amuse and stimulate a thronging southern population. 'Gerontius' is, we may perhaps say for Dr. Newman in the words of Shelley,—

'The voice of his own soul  
Heard in the calm of thought,'

whilst the conceptions of the Spanish dramatist burst into life with tumultuous music, gorgeous scenery, hurrying processions, and all the pomps and splendours of the Catholic Church. No wonder, therefore, that our English auto, though composed with the same general purpose of using verse, and dramatic verse, to promote a religious and even a theological end, should differ from them in essence as well as in form. There is room, however, for both kinds in the wide empire of Poetry, and though Dr. Newman himself would be the first to cry shame upon me if I were to name him with Calderon even for a moment, still his mystery of this most unmysterious age will, I believe, keep its honourable place in our English literature as an impressive, an attractive, and an original production.

If we proceed to examine it in detail, I think, though I speak diffidently, that the finest thing it contains is the early soliloquy of Gerontius when he finds himself, as he believes at first, alone with infinity. The whole of this speech is so real and so plausible, that we accept it at once as the natural continuation of his earthly career, and seem to feel with him that his actual position, however new and previously unimagined, has nothing in it to awaken



either surprise or confusion. I will now, with your permission, read it to you at length:—

‘I went to sleep; and now I am refresh’d,  
A strange refreshment: for I feel in me  
An inexpressive lightness, and a sense  
Of freedom, as I were at length myself,  
And ne’er had been before. How still it is!  
I hear no more the busy beat of time,  
No, nor my fluttering breath, nor struggling pulse;  
Nor does one moment differ from the next.  
I had a dream; yes;—some one softly said  
“He’s gone;” and then a sigh went round the room.  
And then I surely heard a priestly voice  
Cry “Subvenite;” and they knelt in prayer.  
I seem to hear him still; but thin and low,  
And fainter and more faint the accents come,  
As at an ever-widening interval.  
Ah! whence is this? What is this severance?  
This silence pours a solitariness  
Into the very essence of my soul;  
And the deep rest, so soothing and so sweet,  
Hath something too of sternness and of pain,  
For it drives back my thoughts upon their spring  
By a strange introversion, and perforce  
I now begin to feed upon myself,  
Because I have nought else to feed upon.

Am I alive or dead? I am not dead,  
But in the body still; for I possess  
A sort of confidence, which clings to me,  
That each particular organ holds its place  
As heretofore, combining with the rest  
Into one symmetry, that wraps me round,  
And makes me man; and surely I could move,

Did I but will it, every part of me.  
And yet I cannot to my sense bring home  
By very trial, that I have the power.  
'Tis strange; I cannot stir a hand or foot,  
I cannot make my fingers or my lips  
By mutual pressure witness each to each,  
Nor by the eyelid's instantaneous stroke  
Assure myself I have a body still.  
Nor do I know my very attitude,  
Nor if I stand, or lie, or sit, or kneel.'

The rest of the work is much in the same key as the above: it is grave and subdued as to tone, somewhat bare of ornament, but everywhere weighty with thought. It is written also with Dr. Newman's usual mastery over the English language, and moves along from the beginning to the end with a solemn harmony of its own. I am here referring to the blank verse; the speeches rather. The lyrical portions (with the exception of two, on which I shall touch by-and-by) are, in my judgment, less successful. The strains as they flow forth from the various ranks of angels are not, if I may use a somewhat pedantic word, differentiated by any intelligible gradations of feeling and of style, and, indeed, do not move me much more than those average hymns which people, who certainly are not angels yet, sing weekly in church. The interlocutory blasphemies of the demons are still worse.

I cannot help pronouncing them to be mean and repulsive.

I am aware that here there is room for a wide difference of opinion; I know that German critics of renown will tell you that the fiends of Dante or of Tasso are more to be admired than those of 'Paradise Lost.' But, though I do not wish to enter into any abstract discussions on the nature of good and evil, or on the metaphysical effects consequent on utter alienation from God, I yet feel that, poetically speaking, what they say is not true. I stand here in an English University, as an Englishman—an English Philistine, if you will—and profess myself, on that head at least, incurably Miltonic. I do not forget that another class of thinkers, very different from German critics, have arrived, by a separate road, at something like the same conclusion, and that our Miltonic Hades has been condemned by intelligent English divines. The silent valley where the lost spirits sing—

‘With notes angelical to many a harp;’

the intellectual pleasures reserved for them when they reason high—

‘Of fate, free-will, fore-knowledge absolute;’

the noble palace, for which

‘The blazing cressets, fed  
With naphtha and asphaltus, yielded light  
As from a sky,’

are thought of, as opening avenues to something more like comparative happiness, than is consistent with the appointed prison-house of misery and sin. Excellent men, therefore, speak of such fine imaginations as dangerous and deceitful; just as if these sublime visions of our great Puritan poet had lent some colour of plausibility to the hypothetical plans of that Yankee pedlar who, on being asked, when he returned from a business tour in Texas, what kind of a place it was, is said to have replied, ‘Wall, stranger, if Hell and Texas both belonged to me, *I* should sell Texas.’ Now, whatever may be the moral or theological force of these objections, upon me as a poetical critic, and nothing more, they do not tell with any weight. When I look at the question from my own point of view, I think that if you degrade one who was

‘Of the first  
If not the first Archangel,’

into an imp, you destroy, to our apprehensions, his personal identity at once; he is no longer the same being; no longer an antagonist powerful enough to

dispute with Michael; no longer the centre of the hostile system—a spiritual anti-sun, as it were, raying out that darkness which maintains to the end its fierce though unequal battle against the immeasurable light.

Nay, even if Milton had never existed, I should still consider the fiendish shapes of the ‘Inferno,’ who are like nothing so much as the harsh ushers and malignant young bullies of an ill-conducted private school, to be wanting altogether in dignity and effect.

I sympathise with both clauses of Wordsworth’s noble line—

‘Calm pleasures there abide, majestic pains;’

and therefore I turn away, not without a sense of relief, from Dr. Newman’s gibbering devils, to the melancholy grandeur with which Byron, in his ‘Heaven and Earth,’ reproduces our Miltonic idea of a fallen spirit:—

‘Son of the saved,

When thou and thine have braved

The wide and warring element,

Shall thou and thine be happy? No!

Thy new world and new race shall be of woe.

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And art thou not ashamed

Thus to survive,

And eat, and drink, and wive,

With a base heart so far subdued and tamed

As even to hear this wide destruction named?

Who would outlive their kind  
Except the base and blind?

'There is not one who hath not left a throne  
Vacant in heaven, to dwell in darkness here,  
Rather than see his mates endure alone.

Go, wretch, and give  
A life like thine to other wretches—live!  
And when the annihilating waters roar  
Above what they have done,  
Envy the giant patriarchs then no more,  
And scorn thy sire, as the surviving one,  
Thyself for being his 'son.'

In justice to Dr. Newman, however, I must admit that the passage wherein the guardian angel explains to Gerontius why the hellish outcries by which they are assailed are now ineffective and contemptible, is finely conceived and vigorously expressed:—

'In thy trial-state  
Thou hadst a traitor nestling close at home,  
Connatural, who with the powers of hell  
Was leagued, and of thy senses kept the keys,  
And to that deadliest foe unlock'd thy heart.  
And therefore is it, in respect of man,  
Those fallen ones show so majestic.  
But, when some child of grace, Angel or Saint,  
Pure and upright in his integrity  
Of nature, meets the demons on their raid,  
They scud away as cowards from the fight.  
Nay, oft hath holy hermit in his cell,  
Not yet disburden'd of mortality,  
Mock'd at their threats and warlike overtures;



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Or, dying, when they swarm'd, like flies, around,  
Defied them, and departed to his Judge.'

The two rhymed pieces which stand out from all the others as deserving of high commendation are, first, the final utterance of Gerontius after his momentary interview with the hidden power of God: it is full of a sad and yearning melody, well calculated to infuse into our hearts the lesson which Dr. Newman designed it to convey. The other lines to which I referred are those which contain the farewell of the guardian angel, who, in a strain of solemn and tender pensiveness, fitly closes the drama. It may suffice, perhaps, if I read the former of these two, which, upon the whole, I prefer:—

'Take me away, and in the lowest deep  
There let me be,  
And there in hope the lone night-watches keep,  
Told out for me.  
There, motionless and happy in my pain,  
Lone, not forlorn,—  
There will I sing my sad perpetual strain,  
Until the morn.  
There will I sing, and soothe my stricken breast,  
Which ne'er can cease  
To throb, and pine, and languish, till possess  
Of its Sole Peace.  
There will I sing my absent Lord and Love:—  
Take me away,  
That sooner I may rise, and go above,  
And see Him in the truth of everlasting day.'



I think I have now said all that I had to say about the 'Dream of Gerontius;' but perhaps I may venture to add, in conclusion, that little as I sympathise with the actual opinions, or even with the methods of reasoning which characterise Dr. Newman, it has nevertheless been a real pleasure to me to recall the days of my youth, and to feel that he deserved then, and has ever since continued to deserve, the admiring reverence with which he filled the men of my generation. He has bared his heart before the crowd, and all who will may see how true, and pure, and tender a heart it is.

There may be others whom we looked up to likewise, who have surrendered their souls to a bitterer antagonism and a more hostile zeal; who pain us, now and then, by assuming a somewhat unsympathetic demeanour—by seeming to undervalue the memories that lie behind them, and the ties which they compelled themselves to break. If such there are, it is not for us to blame them; we know too well how keen the edge of these disputes, how envenomed the spirit of these religious differences, is and ever must be; but though we blame nobody, it is still lawful for us to rejoice, that one the most eminent of his class, should not, in spite of an unwavering devotion to his new

creed, even wish to forget the years when he worked and flourished at Oxford; that by *him*, at any rate, the old influences are yet spoken of with genuine respect, the old friends with undiminished affection; that of *him*, at any rate, we may yet fairly say, in words which are hacknied no doubt, but hacknied only because they cannot be improved upon—

‘Cum talis sis, utinam noster esses.’

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